



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to DiscoverSM

Voices
from the
Gaps

Cherrie Moraga

“

*I am the welder.
I understand the capacity of heat
to change the shape of things.
I am suited to work
within the realm of sparks
out of control. I am the welder.
I am taking the power
into my own hands.*

— *This Bridge Called My Back*

”



Biography

Cherrie Moraga was born in Los Angeles in 1952. She is of Chicana/Anglo descent which has influenced her experiences as a lesbian poet, playwright, essayist, editor, teacher, and activist.

Moraga describes herself as “La Guera,” which means fair-skinned. She was born with the features of her Chicana mother and the skin of her Anglo father. The history of her family has been a large influence on Moraga’s writing. Her respect for her mother comes from the hardships and struggles that she endured throughout her childhood. At a young age her mother became the main support of her own family after her father left. She worked to survive and had little opportunity to get an education. Without a formal education in English, Moraga’s mother was considered illiterate in this country. Her fluency in Spanish was not passed on to Moraga or her siblings in the hope that they may be able to pass more effectively in “white” society.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1952
- * Her Chicana/Anglo ancestry influences her written work, teaching, and activism
- * An openly lesbian Chicana writer

This page was researched and submitted by: Merideth R. Cleary and Erin E. Fergusson on 12/6/96.



Cherrie Moraga

Biography continued

Because Moraga was fair-skinned, “passing” became a part of daily life that made it easier for her to succeed in the United States. Moraga realized the advantages of having “white privilege” (a term that refers to the privileges of being white and therefore having more advantages in life). This had a counter-affect on Moraga’s ability to connect fully with her Chicana background, pulling her further from her mother and the knowledge of who she really was. Moraga explains, “From all this, I experience a huge disparity between what I was born into and what I grew to become.”

After her college years Moraga made a realization that led to a new found connection with her mother. She acknowledged her own lesbianism after years of hiding it, from not only others, but herself. The acceptance of her homosexuality became a link to the heart of her Chicana heritage and opened new doors for an understanding of herself and her family. “When I finally lifted the lid to my lesbianism, a profound connection with my mother reawakened in me. It wasn’t until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother’s oppression--due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana--was realized,” she said.

Her involvement in writing began early in her life, but her serious works emerged after her “coming out” as a lesbian. She began to grow more as a feminist and her writing became more than a means of expression, it became a way of life. Her lesbianism became an avenue to her success in writing from her heart and her mind, together. This was an important turning point in her relation to writing and where it would lead her.

Moraga began publishing her works in the 1980s. She is one of the first and few Chicana/Lesbian writers of our times, setting the stage for younger generations of other minority writers and activists.

Along with her books Moraga dove into writing plays. The plays deal with the themes surrounding feminism, ethnicity, sexuality, and other gender-related issues. Her work in the theatre has contributed to the growth of the Chicano Theatre. Moraga is currently a member of a Theatre Communications Group and was the recipient of the NEA Theatre Playwriting Fellowship Award. Her most recent play, *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, won the Fund For New American Plays Award, from the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The play was performed at the Brava Theatre Company of San Francisco in May of 1996.

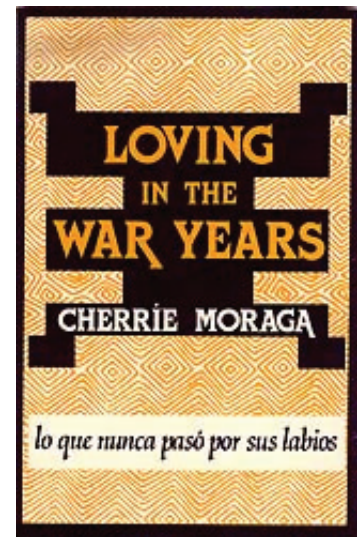


Cherrie Moraga

Biography continued

Around the same time that she published her second book in 1983, Moraga co-founded the group “Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” a group that did not discriminate against homosexuality, class, or race. Moraga involved herself as well in organizing women-of-color groups against violence.

In 1981 Moraga wrote and co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back* with Gloria Anzaldúa, with whom Moraga often collaborated. Perhaps her most successful and attention-gaining book, it was the winner of the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award in 1986.





Cherrie Moraga

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